

## Interludes by CidyKitty

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**Summary:**

A glance at the love between Eleven and Mike from outside eyes.

# 1. Dustin

## Author's Note:

I do not own Stranger Things

Dustin

Dustin watched Mike fidget for what seemed like the hundredth time since sitting down at the square table that had been used for nothing but D and D purposes for as long as it's existence. The legs on the poor thing were beginning to bend, the top was beginning to flake from hands constantly scratching and pounding. Max was considering a move, Mike was a master at creating hard decisions a fork in the road, a hole in the ground, a beast with two heads. That was probably one of the reasons that he remained the campaign master for so long.

In the beginning it had been Lucas's Job. But Mike had taken a shining to it, able to create a story that they could truly believe in and love and fear. So no one begrudged Max that it took her a while to make a decision, even with the help of Lucas.

"I say take a right." Dustin finally cut in. Lucas rolled his eyes at the comment, ever the impatient.

"And go into the forest?" Exasperated.

"It's better than going up the mountain. Trolls, duh." Dustin rolled his eyes this time. Things like this were supposed to be obvious.

"We don't actually know that there are trolls up there." Will pointed out. He was the most patient of them all.

"But it's a possibility." Dustin reminded. Max let out a noise of frustration, a noise that was purely Max. Redheaded frustration.

"Whatever. We're going through the forest." Mike made the necessary moves and turned to Eleven, who was characteristically silent.

"What would you have done?" He asked her.

Mike was the only person who asked her questions like that, mostly because he would get an answer that was more than one word. She stared down at the board. It didn't go unnoticed that both of them had hands tucked under the table, probably intertwined. It wasn't odd to find them holding hands these days, or any days, at any opportunity. No one could miss it. If he were a less observant man he would think that Mike was way more interested in Eleven than Eleven was interested in Mike. But Eleven spoke in cues and motions, her eyes doing most of the talking.

"Forest." Was all she said. Mike beamed with pride. "Me too."

"We should order pizza now." Mike announced. His mom had made the offer some hours ago to do so, but Mike had pushed her off.

"Finally." Dustin whined. It had been hours, the snacks had almost depleted to nothing. All that was left was plain salted potato chips and chips ahoy cookies that were going past their prime since the package had been open all night. This was their second night there, the girls had joined sometime in the afternoon.

"Eleven's hungry." Mike chirped as he dragged Eleven (by the hand) up the stairs to contact his Mom about pizza.

"Yeah, we eat when Eleven is hungry." Max grumbled.

Their relationship was still a bit sour, not that Dustin could blame Max. If you didn't know Eleven she could be a hard nut to crack, she could be Antarctica in winter when she distrusted someone, which she clearly distrusted Max. Not that Mike helped matters, he cooled off some on Max, let her come to their game nights, join sleep overs and movie nights. But his attitude to her didn't change much. Eleven and Max seemed to bounce emotions off of each other. But Dustin

figured it would heal in time, Max was one of those people who was hard to resist.

"Don't say anything to them, they're still...touchy." Lucas said. Touchy was an understatement. In both the figurative and literal sense. Since returning there were very few days that Eleven and Mike didn't spend together. There were some times, like school, of course where they couldn't be together but that didn't stop Mike from rushing through the woods to the cabin as soon as school was out, and Hopper would drop him back home when he got off.

No one really said anything about it because there wasn't much to be said. They had never expected Eleven to come back, at least - not really, not truly not in a way that actually meant anything. They all hoped sure, but hope is a lot different than actually believing. He knew that Mike had struggled after the disappearance of Eleven. Hell, they all struggled. But he took it the hardest. Everything started slipping. His grades, his attitude, his basic want to live and do basic maintenance on his person. There was a time months after Eleven had gone missing that his hair had been long enough to brush his shoulders and be put in a pony tail.

Those were the days.

This Mike wasn't that much different than the Mike from before. But this Mike had a goal in mind, he had to do good in school and do his chores and trim his hair because if not he damaged his chance of seeing Eleven.

Hopper was stingy with Eleven, she wasn't allowed out of the cabin all that often and even less often they were allowed to visit there. But nights like tonight, where Hopper was working the late shift and working on the remodel of his house she was allowed a sleepover. Typically, it was Will's house. Joyce was the second most protective of Eleven and she and the Byers family shared some creepy bond. But every once in a while she was allowed at the Wheeler residence, as long as Nancy was home and promised to keep a close eye on the kids. That was a night like tonight.

Mrs.Wheeler was absolutely infatuated with Jim Hopper's newest addition and was sworn to secrecy. Which didn't help put any

distance between Mike and Eleven.

The both of them bound back down the stairs, hand in hand.

"What kind of pizza?" Dustin asked eagerly. They really should have ordered it hours ago.

"One standard pepperoni for you losers and a pineapple one for El and me." Max wrinkled her freckled nose at them.

"Pineapple on Pizza?"

"Never heard of it in fancy California?" Mike shot back. They were getting better, their banter had a little less acid in it.

"No. Mostly because it's probably gross."

Eleven left the D&D table and shuttled over to the fort, she had left the book she was reading, *The Hobbit*, there when they started and it seems they had lost her interest because she curled up on the floor with the book and flipped the page back open. Contrary to popular belief Eleven knew how to read, she had trouble with some words so she kept a small dictionary with her in her bag, but she could read. She was also an extraordinarily fast learner. She was about half way through the *Hobbit*.

Steve, her Chief appointed babysitter, took her to the bookstore with a small handful of cash every other Friday for her to pick up a couple of books to keep her occupied, but she was reading faster and faster, soon she would need a library card.

"How's the book Elle?" Elle had been the name that Joyce had given her, and it was the name that was going to be in her new decorated room as soon as renovations on the Hopper house were complete. Not that Dustin was supposed to know that but Steve had taken a summer job helping out with the renovations and spilled some secrets on their weekend ice cream runs.

"Interesting." Was all she said, her brow was furrowed and her lip was being bitten in concentration. It was what Lucas called her 'learning face' the face she made when she was deep in thought about something she didn't understand.

"Really, I don't know why you're reading The Hobbit first. The Lord of the Rings is much better." This earned him an eye roll from Will.

"She needs to read The Hobbit before the Lord of the Rings, that's the way it goes." He says. Will was slowly gaining his fire back, the color to his cheeks, the shine in his eyes. The weeks following his internal battle with The Mind Flayer had been hell on both his mind and his body. But he came through under the watchful eye of the group.

"She can read whatever she wants to read." Mike settled reluctantly back into his chair, obviously wanting to go and sit beside Eleven. In all fairness to Mike he tried to remain normal. Not letting his relationship (special friendship? companionship?) with Eleven get in the way of his other friendships, still hanging out with the boys and Steve and even on occasion going to catch a movie with Nancy. But they could all tell when his eyes starting dancing and his fingers started twitching where he really wanted to be.

The night when on such as that. With the boys slowly teaching Max the workings of D&D and going as far in the story as they could before complete chaos happened and the game had to be dissolved until further notice. All the While El had silently sat under the fort and read through the Hobbit, Mike glancing out of the corner of his eye at her as she furrowed her brow at the book.

The pizza had since been delivered and torn apart, Eleven shoving two pieces in her mouth faster than anyone could blink. The only person she practiced table manners around was Hopper. Lucas and Dustin wheeled the TV out of the corner and quickly put on Star Wars, another thing neither Max nor Eleven had experienced.

Max had a million questions, about everything. To the point that even Lucas almost told her to shut up (although, smart boy, he would never do that.) But Eleven just quietly watched from underneath the quilt that Mike had wrapped around her. No one commented about how close they sat or how Mike's head had leaned to rest a bit on her shoulder because everyone knew that was a one way street to getting your head bit off. Their affection, while small, was poignant and personal and Dustin felt a little bit like an intruder just being in the same room.

When night finally fell and midnight rolled around everyone hustled about, unrolling their sleeping bags and settling in. Lucas and Will bickered for the spot closest to the television and while they were distracted Max slipped in and took it, tucked into her dark green sleeping bag, red hair tight in a bun. The Wheeler's hands off parenting strategy had allowed for things that the boys never dreamed would happen, girls! staying the night! But in everyone's eyes but Lucas, Max didn't count as a girl. She was just one of the guys.

At 2 a.m. a dream shook Dustin awake. They often did, although most of the time it wasn't when he was surrounded by friends. In his dreams those slimy veins were covering his feet and ankles, the hot breath of the demo-dogs was right on his neck. It all felt dangerous, it felt sudden, it didn't at all feel like something that had happen months prior. Shaking himself awake and brushing off the lasting sting from the nightmare. He looked around the room. Will was asleep on the couch curled into a little ball under three blankets. Lucas and Max were back to back in front of the television, he had fallen asleep to their quiet whispering, secrets between them lulling him to sleep. Will took a sleeping pill these days that put him out like a light. Which would explain his heavy snoring from the couch, something he had never done before.

He looked toward the for fort to find El and Mike, but found it empty. Shaking himself further awake he looked about to see if he could see them sprawled across the floor. He stepped lightly out of his sleeping back. Going on a hunt for a piece of pizza and Mike and Elle. The pizza was easy to find, although all that was left over was the pineapple which he ate (noting that it actually wasn't so bad) and then hit the stairs. The fact that they could be in Mike's room brought a flush to his face. Because that means they would be in there. With the door closed. They weren't in the living room or the sitting room, and he highly doubted they were in Nancy's room. The door to Mike's room was firmly shut.

He creaked it open.

They were cramped on Mike's tiny twin sized bed. Legs bent together

heads tilted forward both touching but barely there. Mike's head was twisted back on his pillow, Eleven's head was cushioned in the space between his arm pit. They looked a bit like an old married couple, like people who had been doing this for dozens of years. Not two thirteen-year old's who didn't know how stupid this seemed.

He wanted to shake them awake for their stupidity. How could they fall asleep in his room!? What if his parent's caught them!? but instead he pulled the blanket off of the back of Mike's desk chair and rolled on the ground, shutting the door to the room.

He would find comfort with them tonight.



## **2. Karen Wheeler**

### **Summary for the Chapter:**

It could have been anytime between when he was 14 to now, at 17 years old, a lanky boy with good grades, the president of the high school AV club, and in love.

Mike squirted ketchup on his tater tot casserole and Jane wrinkled her nose, "Gross babe."

Karen Wheeler watched over the rim of her wine glass as Mike hovered the ketchup bottle over Jane's plate in threat and she slapped it away, all the while sporting a small smile on her face. Jane was a visitor at dinner almost every night, and if she wasn't here she was at her father's and Mike was over there.

Ted had voice before that they should try to separate the two, and it's not like Karen had never thought of it but they were oh, so fascinating. Karen didn't fall in love with Ted until after they were married. During the courting phase a sense of duty had overcome her, she was young and half way through college. She wanted a house and kids and a stable future. So many of her friends were struggling with finding fulfilling jobs and petty relationships. Ted was easy, he was easy to please and easy to get along with. He wasn't argumentative or confrontational. She wouldn't ever have to worry about him hurting her or breaking her heart, it wasn't in him. He was a settler. They dated for five months during school and once he graduated and was accepted at his company he proposed. And she didn't think for a second to say no. The marriage was quick and easy, her parents were happy and she had Ted. Soon came Nancy.

She didn't fall in love with Ted until she saw how much he loved Nancy, when she watched him brush his nose over her small nose in the hospital room and swaddle her with the utmost care with a tiny, dainty pink blanket. She fell for him all over again when Michael was born, and he wept silently at the sight of his newborn son. Michael had probably been in love with Jane all his life. He was probably born that way, somewhere deep in his brain part of him knew, buried

in his spinal cord that he was going to meet this girl with the curly hair and the big brown eyes and the crooked, small smile who called him "Mikey." And played D&D with him and he was going to love her.

She has never had love like Mike has, she had never had someone touch her soul the way that they touch each others soul's.

She had never seen them say it, but she didn't really need to. For all her life she worried about her children, it was the only thing she could do that kept her grounded. She felt like she wouldn't have to worry about Nancy. Smart, practical Nancy. But in the end, it was Mike that she didn't have to worry about.

There were times of course, like the summer of '83 when he about stopped talking and starting sleeping in a blanket for in the basement. When he got in tense fights at school and his grades slipped for the first time in his life. But like Aloe to a burn it was like Jane had healed all of that. It was like she had taped over his potty mouth and rung together his friends.

Sure she was an odd girl, her stares were really intense and her sense of fashion was odd, but Karen couldn't complain. As far as Karen was aware Jane could often be found hiking with her dad or skateboarding with Max, on the skateboard arms wrapped around the other girls waist. Karen didn't even know how they did it.

"Dinner is really good Mrs. Wheeler." Jane complimented, scooping bites in her mouth. The girl ate like she was starving and always had the best of manners. Dainty little hands, nails tipped green gripping the fork, a ring made of woven fibers around the forth finger of her left hand. It looked like a friendship ring.

"Thank you honey, and please, call me Karen." She's said that to her maybe a hundred times, since first meeting her in the foyer, hand in hand with Mike she's said "Call me Karen." And she never has.

There are times when she thinks Ted is right. Ted, who thinks that there is something unnatural about their relationship. He calls them "too close" and "dangerous." And by Dangerous he means for Mike's heart, she thinks. There are times when she has thought this too. When she thinks that maybe things have happened too fast. When they are forehead to forehead over the dinning room table doing

homework, eyes closed like they are reading each others minds. When Jane comes over and has a few dustings of bruises that could only be made by kissing on her neck. When they were caught sleeping in the same bed, Karen didn't wake them up and didn't tell Ted. There was something about this that she needed to protect. It has caused a few explosive arguments around the Wheeler house. Ted, not wanting Mike to get his heart broken, wanting him to spend less time with Jane. And Mike, refusing.

So she chooses not to say anything, if that makes her a bad mother than so be it.

"What are your summer plans hon?" She asks, sipping her glass and poking at her casserole. She should have made that damn pot roast. Jane sighs.

"I'm going to take a summer class down at the center, yoga." She says.

"Mike is going to do driving lessons, is that something you're going to do?" Karen asks. Mike will be the first of his friends with a car, at 17 he's starting to get to the age where she can trust him to be home by curfew without delay.

"No. Dad is teaching me." Karen thinks it hilarious to this day that anyone calls the hardened bull headed Chief of Police 'dad' but with Jane it just rolls off the tongue. "He says it'll be easier, I have a feeling I'll be enrolled in driving lessons by the end of the summer too." Jane rolled her eyes, Karen laughed. The front door opened, closed and Ted lumbered in, pulling off his tie.

"Smells good honey." He says, collapsing in his chair.

"Jane, Mike." He addresses. Ted keeps his distrust of their relationship mostly under wraps to their face, which Karen thanks the lord for.

"Hello Mr. Wheeler." Jane says, Karen notices that their arms are underneath the table and surmises that they are holding hands. Nancy was never this affectionate with her boyfriends. Always embarrassed about affection in front of the family, Mike had no such

qualms and would hold hands with Jane anywhere. Holly had taken notice of it and would make false gagging noises whenever she caught them.

“We’re talking about summer plans.” Karen told Ted, serving him a plate of casserole. It was funny, Mike always served Jane, filling her plate up before he made his own. Even if his friends were over or they were out to eat, she got her fill before he got his. Jonathan and Nancy were much the same way. Karen wondered if it was a generation thing.

“Ah, still thinking about getting a job son?” Ted had been pushing Mike to find some summer work. Not necessarily for the money, they had plenty of that, but as a separation tool.

“Actually, Dad.” Mike set his fork down, his eyes were hard and Karen was worried. “Chief Hopper offered me a job down at the station, taking calls. Monday through Wednesday on Flo’s days off.”

“That’s great honey!” Karen exclaimed, Ted just pursed his lips.

Dinner went by mostly silent and Jane helped her clean, putting the dishes in the washer and wiping the dining room table down afterwards she crept into the living to catch some television with Mike.

As she was going to creep upstairs she heard the sound of voices coming from the living room and against her better judgement she stopped to listen, something about mothering instincts and curiosity, their voices rose up from behind the couch and she caught the tail end of their conversation.

“I can’t believe dad gave you that Job. If you mess anything up Flo is going to kill you.” It was the most words she had ever heard the girl

Speak, she wasn't a talker or a giggler. She was more like a silent entity about the house.

"I've got this, have no fear!" Mike crowed. There was gentle giggling.

"And, it pays better than half the jobs in town. I can save up a little money so maybe next year.." Mike trailed off, and Karen pushed up against the wall to hear better.

"Maybe next year we can.. or I can ... afford something better, than that little piece of string."

"I like my string."

It took Karen a moment to process, and it wasn't until later in the middle of the night that it would hit her. The bound string that was on the fourth finger of Jane's left hand. It wasn't a friendship ring, it was a promise ring, or something more. Made of the fibers on the blankets that were over the blanket fort in the basement.

"You deserve more than string." She tells him. Karen peeks around the wall to see them, their backs to her on the long couch. Jane laying between his legs, her head on his chest their hands intertwined.

"I can't go to your dad and tell him that I want to marry you without a ring, El. He won't go for it." Mike said. "he already hates me."

Jane giggled, "He doesn't hate you. He actually likes you. He likes Will better, but he likes you the most."

"Great. Will. Your brother is my competition."

Jane stretched her neck up and kissed Mike's chin. "There's no competition. You're my love. You're my life. And I think if Will thought about kissing me anywhere but on the cheek he would vomit." Jane's kisses trailed up, she was craning her neck. "And when I tell him that he's going to say, 'alright, no problem, take her off my hands.'"

Mike laughed out loud, cheeks flushing in humor under the light of the television. "Yeah, over his dead body."

"I love you, El."

Later, when Karen is soaking in the tub reading her latest romance novel, she puts it down and drowns her red wine. Her son is in love, in a type of love that she had never experienced. With a girl with a deep stare and a coil of string around her ring finger. She wonders when that happened, under what starry sky there laying under when Mike wove together those fibers to shape a ring. It could have been anytime between when he was 14 to now, at 17 years old, a lanky boy with good grades, the president of the Hawkins AV club, and in love.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm thinking about making a short about the ring,  
how it came about and how Mike gave it to Eleven.  
Let me know if I should!

### 3. Will

#### Summary for the Chapter:

This is just a short chapter on Will.

The time spent after he's released from The Mind Flayer is weird between he and Eleven, mostly because he spends most his time staring. He can't seem to find words to balance on his tongue that make sense when they come out that have enough gratitude and awe and shock at her because he's been in the monsters head, he's heard their chatter and they're afraid of her.

Will doesn't think that Mike understands that he's dating what is probably the strongest being in their universe. He knows that Mike doesn't know the way that the monster they feared were hiding under their beds, quake in fear at Eleven. He distinctly remembers the fear from the Mind Flayer when she stepped up the gate, how strong the power of her felt like singing him, burning him and stinging the entity out. How the chitter turned from power and hunger to fear and hatred.

Eleven doesn't quite get that she's a superhero. And he kind of gets it. No one treats her like she is one, like she didn't save the world twice and be back by dinner like she wasn't an interdimensional traveler capable of ripping the world in half, flipping vans and closing portals in time and space. Instead, she's treated like a girl who loves breakfast foods and is just now getting the hang of full sentences.

To Hopper, she is his child. His baby, though he's never said it out loud. And to Mike, well, she's simply the girl he's in love with.

Which is odd, Will has never been one to be able to quite grasp his emotions in his hand, he feels sadness and anger and fear most of all but even then they are passing things signals for greater emotions to come that he's not quite capable of feeling yet. Mike somehow feels love. Mike feels emotions like no one else he knows, intensely purely. Will can vividly remember the time in which they thought Eleven was gone, disappeared into the bleak of the Upside Down. Seeing pure anger and frustration and malice in his friend as he lashed out

and caved.

Will feels love for his brother and an immense love for his mother that he will probably never grow out of. He wonders if maybe Mike is able to have this superpower, the power to love, because the feelings for his own family are so stale. Sure, he loves his mother and sister and dad, but maybe those feelings are in the back of his mind and the feelings for Eleven are in the front of his mind.

Clearly, his feelings for Eleven are in the front of his mind at all times. In the year that followed the Mind Flayer's first assault, things look up. They know that Eleven is a live and the gate is closed and well, if it opens up again they have the proper ammo. But other things happen too, like Hopper and his mom. That he kind of expected. When you defeat monsters twice there has to be something there. But it seems to just fall into place and by the middle of the year he's brushing his teeth next to Hopper in the mornings in the bathroom. Hopper doesn't stay over often because if he does stay than he has to bring Eleven.

The sleepovers are weird between just him and her, because he doesn't know what to say and she's not the most articulate person. Hopper and his mother would sit on the back porch and smoke and talk about old times before retiring to bed and he would be left in front of the television with a mostly quiet Eleven who hunched over with books and a dictionary and mostly did reading. Things were awkward between them because at that age, and even sometimes now he's sure that Eleven must see him as the monster. He was the spy. And it's hard for him too, to shake of the remnants of the hold the monster had on him and leave fear in the dust.

He made the mistake of in late September that year telling Mike that on occasion, Eleven stayed at his house. In the span of thirty seconds Mike went through a few shades of emotions in only the way that Mike can, quick and passionate. He was angry, and then upset, and then curious and then determined. In Mike's mind, it wasn't fair that Will got to see Eleven and he didn't. So in typical Wheeler fashion he invited himself over and made it so that when Eleven was at the Byers residence, so was he.

Without Mike, Will probably would have never gotten to know Eleven. But with Mike, Eleven was a different person. The darkness in



her eyes became swallowed up with curious delight, she laughed, she flinched, she smiled. Mike made Eleven human in the eyes of Will.

He could see them now, sitting on the edge of the quarry in their bathing suits. Mike, pale and skinny and Eleven golden brown and like the sun. Max is splashing around at the end of the quarry in her bathing suit, making kissy faces at Lucas and Dustin (who was flipping her the bird.) Eleven had yet to get in the water, something of which she was still wary of outside of hot baths, hotter showers and sprinklers in the back yard. At 16 she is tall and lanky, her hair is a wild mane like a lions down her shoulders, in a weird way, although they are not biologically related she looks a bit like Hopper. Same tanned skin, dark hair and a you'll-regret-this expression on their face.

"Jay!" Max yells over at Eleven, the only person who calls her Jay, a chip off of Jane (which is what everyone at school knows her as.) Max is holding armfuls of stones. Dustin has gone off and is doing the finish work on inflating his raft, which on the box said could fit two people, but it looked like it could barely fit Dustin.

Eleven stood, dusted the mix of sand and little pebbles off her thighs and made her way over to Max. Will watched the dreamy expression on Mike's face.

"Let's skip these rocks." She said. Handing Jane a large flat stone.

"Skip rock?" Eleven asked, brow furrowed. It was an expression that was often seen on her face. She was so underexposed that oftentimes little things during the day would throw her off, expressions and sayings that she should already know.

"Yeah, I'll show you. You give your wrist a good turn, and lightly throw the rock so that it bounces on the surface of the water." Max instructed, and gave a demonstration. It was pretty good. When Eleven tried, the result wasn't so good, but no one would say anything, this wasn't that type of group. The borders of their friendship prohibited making fun of Eleven when she couldn't do something.

"Oh hey, just use your little." Max wiggled her fingers next to her

temple. "Mind thing." Eleven looked down at the stone, and back at the lake. A stone drifted in the air and to the top of the water gently, before quickly launching up in the air and quickly down to bounce off the surface. It flew so hard that it was lost in the distance. There was still so much amazement around her abilities, which weren't used that often, that everyone was silent for a few moments before cheers broke out. It was hard in times like this for everyone else, swimming in the quarry, playing in the sun, that one of their party members has these abilities. It was easy for them to forget, not for Will. He will never forget the strength of that power.

Dustin flopped his inflatable on the surface of the water and waded in after it.

"Do you think you could make waves?" Dustin directs at Eleven, who stares at the water, lip between teeth. With her brow furrowed the water slowly starts to shift, back and forth, sloshing until there are sizeable waves. Within moments everyone is excitedly talking to each other. Ideas flowing from mouths like water from faucets. Eleven could create waves, they could surf, new competitions, new games, the new possibilities, they are all abruptly shut down by Mike's booming yell.

"Hey!"

There were a few times that Will had heard that voice, loud and angry, it was a sign that that famous Wheeler temper problem was coming to a head. Mike was there, dry and angry. Red in the face and frowning. His fists were clenched at his side. Sometime in the last few seconds he had made his way over to Eleven and was standing in front of her as if shielding her from their eyes. It was something they had seen a few times also, Mike could be fiercely protective of Eleven. From temporarily kicking them out of the basement, to staying up at the cabin for days at a time getting no sleep.

“She’s not a dog.” He spat. “She’s not here for your amusement, and she shouldn’t use her powers to entertain you. They drain her.”

Will, looking at Eleven could see the paleness in her face, the veins under her eyes.

“Sorry El.” Dustin said, looking down at the water.

“It’s okay.” She said, a small smile on her face. Mike turned, and with a singer finger wiped the blood from her face and wiped it on her swimming shorts. For a moment, Will felt like he was an intruder, like they weren’t out in the open where anyone could see but instead like he was peeping in on them as they leaned in to kiss. They met in the middle like a gravitational pull, lips chapped and connecting. It was brief, barely a second before they broke apart. Mike led El to the water and let her step in first, cold water brushing her toes.

To Mike, Eleven wasn’t an interdimensional traveler, or a powerful queen of mind control, maybe she was hero. To him, she was just a girl.

A girl he was in love with.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I kept thinking of how weird their relationship would be (Will and Eleven's) after everything happened and I came up with this. Enjoy. Next up... I'm at a toss between Nancy and Max. Another female.

## 4. Nancy Wheeler

### Summary for the Chapter:

Nancy sees the sun.

Nancy is home for Christmas. She tries to split her time evenly but it's really hard to do. There has always been a part of her that doesn't really like home. Moving away to go to NYU wasn't hard, she loves the city and it's sometimes hard to come back. That she's not ashamed to admit. She's more ashamed that she doesn't really miss anyone.

She gets worried, sure. She worries a lot about mom. Sitting all alone out here trying to make the best decisions for the family. For all of her life her dad hasn't been much of a help, he can oftentimes be mistaken as a ghost around the house carrying a camera full of pictures that won't ever get printed. Her mom has always had too much time on her hands, time to worry about the futures of her children in a way that is wholeheartedly unnecessary. She and Mike, and probably Holly, can take care of themselves.

Holly was a bit of a surprise to Nancy. As she hadn't been expecting her, no one had. She thought their parents were long done with children after Mike. But Holly was sweet and small and blonde and liked to do cheer and other things that neither Nancy nor Mike really wanted to do, so now her Mom's schedule and Sunday night scheduled phone calls were filled with anecdotes about Holly's new Girl Scout troop or her cheer competitions or her gymnastic bake sale. Holly was like her mother's last chance at social freedom.

Mike had always been an enigma, wrapped in a mystery, wrapped in a hard taco shell. He was so different than she thought he would be, each year he got stranger and stranger and soon they couldn't relate at all. So much of that was her fault though. When they were growing up Nancy had tried, truly tried, to relate to her little brother. She felt like it was her big sister duty to take care of Mike, if nothing else be able to be there for him when no one else was.

Too bad it took monster from another dimension to get them close.

That was the first time Nancy thinks that she saw the real Mike. Brave, smart, cunning Mike. Mike who loved his little group of rag tag friends so much he would crawl into a hole in the ground full of man eating monsters to help them. So much that he would run from government agents with them.

Sometimes she feels like Mike was born in the wrong family. He was meant to be with brave people, somewhere on the edge of the world doing something ground breaking, his head and heart far away. Instead he was stuck in boring Hawkings, head in the clouds.

After everything (everything being the time that a hole to another dimension was ripped open and everything went to hell in a handbasket) she tried her hardest to stay connected with her little brother. But it was hard, with them being so different, with such different dreams and personalities. She knew, in the very least, that they would have one mutual experience to bond over.

So she took to throwing herself into she and Jonathan's relationship and Mike resumed basement sessions with his friends plus the red head girl and sometime later the girl that flipped cars and closed gates with her mind and also weirdly enough hanging out with her ex-boyfriend.

Nancy never really got Eleven. They never really connected. Jonathan told her not to worry, Eleven didn't really connect with anyone. But it was hard for Nancy, she felt often like the odd man out especially when Eleven starts hanging out with everyone. Joyce, Will, Hopper, hell even Steve. People tell Nancy that Eleven (or Elle, or Jane or whoever) is really charming, calm and even funny. But Nancy never really gets to see that. To Nancy she is a solemn face girl with big bouncy curls, old soul brown eyes and a perpetual frown.

Like now, sitting across from Nancy (who is feeling kind of lonely because Jonathan is out with Joyce doing last minute Christmas things for Will and Hopper and she's at her families Christmas Eve Dinner alone.) Eleven, or Jane, as her family knows her as is sitting in one of the dinning room chairs, straight backed, hands in her lap staring down at her plate. Her mother is setting last minute dishes down on the table before bustling over to the table. Holly is trying to engage Mike in conversation who is bent over a black leather bound

notebook scribbling inside. She knows first hand that it's his D&D book, she's seen it enough. Jane never looks nervous, or intrigued, or peaked or any other identifiable emotions, she just looks Jane.

Nancy clears her throat, "So Jane. How's your dad?"

Jane looks up at her, dark eyes glowing. It's hard for Nancy not to be at least a little bit scared of Eleven. She's heard the stories, she's seen the girl leave her body and talk to someone in another dimension in a deprivation tank.

"Good." Is all she says. Mike finally drops his notebook and slides it underneath his chair. Nancy takes in her little brother, all grown up and gangly. Long limbs all spread, messy black hair down to his shoulders. At 17 he has all the confidence in his future that she will never possess.

She can see movement under the table which much indicate that they are holding hands. Which is cute. Dinner is started after a quick prayer and her parents are trying to make conversation. Artfully asking her how school is going, when her next visit home is going to be. She assures them that everything is fine, and that she will be back in the spring. She doesn't bring up Jonathan, it's a bit of a sore subject. Her mother is sure that Jonathan is the reason that she moved to New York and sure he's part of it, but not all. Her father likes Jonathan, but only because Jonathan puts on a good act in front of him and avoids family dinners. She also surprises them by letting them know that her and Jonathan will be home for the summer this year. Her mother cheers, Holly smiles and Dad gives the little grin he gives when you know he's barely listening.

"Any other good announcements?" Holly asks, after announcing of course that she is going to be head cheerleader this upcoming spring.

Mike clears his throat, "Jane and I are engaged."

The table is dead silent. Everyone's eyes zoom in Jane's hands where she is holding her fork, her left hand and on her little ring finger is a small silver ring with a pearl in it. She is neither flushing nor blinking.

Dad drops his fork, Mom lets out a gasp that sounds a little like she's choking and Holly is looking a little deflated. Nancy can't seem to process the thoughts, because engaged. Engaged? How can they be engaged. They're just children. She hasn't thought about marrying Jonathan, and she's sure that Jonathan has never thought about marrying her. Nancy thinks of something:

"Does Hopper know?" She chokes out. Jane nods her head, mouth never breaking from her frown.

"I asked him first." Mike said, squinting at her as if to say 'duh.'

"Absolutely not." Their father finally speaks. At this Jane's face does change. Her frown deepens, her eyes narrow.

"Excuse—" Before Mike can get a sentence out their father is banging a fist on the table the way that Nancy has never seen before, his voice raised, "absolutely not. Michael you're 17, that's too young to be married. Don't you want to go to college?"

Mike's face does what Nancy has seen it do a thousand times, he goes red, and then pale and his eyes get dark, he's angry.

"What does marrying Jane have to do with me going to college?" He spits.

"This is lunacy. Jesus, Karen say something." But Mom is just blinking, but she's not shocked, which is a little suspicious.

"How is this lunacy? I love Jane!" Mike roars, standing from his seat, glaring down at their father. Their father stands too, and it's only then that Nancy realizes that Mike is taller than him, practically towering over him.

“You can love someone and not marry them! For chistsakes Michael I’m tired of this. The moment you step foot on a college campus you’re going to see there are other girls out there that aren’t Jane Hopper.” Their father spews. Michael is positively shaking now.

“You’ve never liked Jane! She’s never done anything to you and you hate her.” Mike roars. “I’m never going to love anyone else.” He shouts. Christmas dinner is becoming forgotten in the fog.

“I don’t hate her but I’m not going to allow this!” Their father is shouting.

“You don’t have to allow anything.” Mike hisses, he jerks down, grasps Jane by the forearm and hauls her out of her seat. Jane has a hand up to her nose and for a moment Nancy thinks that maybe she’s crying but she sees a small smear of blood on her index finger and notices that all the glasses on the table, the presents by the Christmas tree, and the garland on the stairs are all gently levitating an inch off their respective surfaces. Everything gently floats back down, no one the wiser. With the slamming of the front door and the roar of the engine, Mike is gone, Jane with him.

Christmas day is the next day, and the Wheeler house is quiet after a long night of yelling. Nancy calls Jonathan and warns him not to come over. Her parents are upstairs fighting all night, trudging footsteps, angry shouts, Holly runs to her room and slams the door. In the morning, it seem that all is well. Her mother asks her that if she sees Mike at The Hopper-Byer residence to tell him to come home, they have things to talk about. Dad looks fairly apologetic, Nancy takes it as a good sign.

After Christmas dinner with the Byer-Hopper family, in which during she shoots Mike worried looks but he looks calm and happy between



a scrawny Will and a slightly smiling Jane, Nancy tells him that Mom and Dad want to talk, but it'll probably be a good talk. Before heading home she gives him the directions to a nearby field, it's a familiar place, on stumps and half done fence there are coke cans. Nancy digs around in her car glove box for the trusty revolver. It's time she taught her brother how to shoot.

Mike surprises her as she walks over to his car he seems to already know what they're doing, out of his glove box he pulls out a shiny black gun. It makes her heart jump in her chest. They silently trudge through the woods and come to the make shift range where she and Jonathan used to come after school to get some frustrations out.

Mike is a surprisingly good shot.

"So where'd you get the gun?" She asks him, after a few moments of silence while their appraising their work.

"Hopper." He says, and smirks. "Yeah it was a 17 year birthday present. Coming from my girlfriends Dad it was a little weird." Mike admitted.

"And you learned to shoot by yourself?" Mike nodded.

"Hopper helped a little, but I wanted to get good so I came out here as often as I could." She doesn't ask how he knows about the place. Will probably said something.

"Well you're pretty good." She admits.

"I have to be." He says, suddenly very serious. "If those assholes come back looking for Jane."

Nancy never really thought of that, if the whole thing with her was just over, or not. If people were still looking for her, if she was safe. Nancy examined her brother for a moment, his tight stance and deadly accuracy with that gun. Nancy want's to remind Mike that Jane can take care of herself, Jane could take care of all of them. Jane could through monsters through living room windows with her mind. But there's something about his face, a tight determination.

"You really love her don't you." Nancy whispered. Mike looked at

her, straight in the eyes, no blush on his face.

“Of course.” He said. He was unabashed, un-shy, so sure in his love at 17 years old.

“How do you know?” Nancy asked. It was a question she had asked herself a thousand times waking up next to Jonathan, waking up next to Steve, waking up by herself. How could you be sure? It’s not like there is a set of rules or symptoms to love, everyone loves differently.

Mike shrugged, “It’s like I know at night that the sun is going to rise in the morning. I know that I love El. It’s like it’s always been in me. Like even when she was gone it was dormant, sleeping. And then she was back.” He says. It’s the most romantic thing she’s ever heard, and it’s coming from her 17-year-old nerd brother who’s in love with a government weaponized girl.

“And you really want to get married?” She pushes. Sitting down, revolver in her lap. He snorts.

“It took me forever to convince her I wasn’t joking. I haven’t even told the guys yet. I had to tell Hopper, well ask Hopper.” Nancy tried to picture the meeting in her head, what it would be like, her tall lanky brother and the bull shouldered police chief having it out over some girl in a pink dress and a skateboard.

“So she didn’t say no.” Nancy surmised.

“Yeah. But she didn’t say yes either. Just put the ring on and said it was a done deal.” At this Mike sounded mildly amazed.

“You think I’m being stupid?” Mike asked, suddenly looking away from her, gazing into the distance sun slowly going down. Nancy thinks on this, the way that they look at each other shy glances over picked over plates. Long intense stares, nose to nose on the loveseat in the living room. She thinks of her relationship with Jonathan, about doing laundry at the laundromat on Sundays with him, listening to his music, basking in his joy.

“No.” She announces. “If Eleven is your sun, you shouldn’t let it go away.” She wonders if Mike was right, if it was always in him. Laying

sleeping, dormant, this love, until he ran into her in the dark, flash light on her face, if at that moment this love, this thing, this tangible atmosphere around them sprung up and their fates were sealed, fated to love each other until their last breath.

That night they go home and deal with the fallout, dad is sorry, Mike is sorry, Mom is quiet. Which is all the more suspicious, she knew something was up. Mike opens his gifts and tentatively invites Jane over to open hers. Their parents gift her with a new white cardigan and a couple of new books. Mom gives her a hug that she awkwardly returns. Dad apologizes, placing a hand on her arm and giving them the congratulations. Afterward, when they're all sitting around watching a Christmas movie, Nancy follows Jane to the kitchen to refill her eggnog. The other girl is quiet spooning in two mugs of Mom's homemade apple cider.

"Congrats." Nancy says, in passing. But Jane looks at her, with a smile. The first one Nancy has ever seen on her face, in a moment she is transformed, happy smile lines form around her eyes which sparkle honey colored even in the dim light of the kitchen. Jane glances down at her ring finger, all proud with its pearl and band. And in that moment Nancy can see so clearly the girl that her brother loves, this powerful, ethereal being. Like the sun in the way that it draws you near, warm on your skin, reminding you of happier times.

She can see why she is Mike's sun.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I was so nervous about this chapter. It goes by quick, and Nancy can be hard to write. So I hope you enjoy it. Up next: I'm stuck between either Lucas or Max. And the next chapter will go back to their current ages during show time.

**Author's Note:**

Drop me a note, what do you think? I do not own  
Stranger Things.